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AUTHOR Cuban, Larry

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ABSTRACT

This essay argues that the key assumptions driving standards-based school reform and accountability testing are inapplicable to urban schools, suggesting that tasks facing urban school leaders differ both in magnitude and kind from those found in other school districts. The current all-purpose reform solutions treat all schools as the same while neglecting the vital linkages between cities, their schools, and the country's economic and social well-being. The essay discusses how to learn from the past, focusing on efforts to copy successful businesses and on the confusion between setting standards and standardization in educational reform. It examines the current reform agenda, which involves expecting more from superintendents and changing systems of governance. It dispels three common urban myths (big city school districts are ungovernable, the superintendency is a revolving door that brings in and tosses out school leaders one after the other, and schools alone can improve the chances of poor children). The essay concludes with an agenda for action, highlighting the importance of urban leaders in school reform and discussing the tough tasks ahead for those who believe in the civic and moral obligations that accompany the improvement of both cities and schools. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

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An Essay by Larry Cuban

School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative

September 2001

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1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 822-8405
Fax (202) 872-4050
iel@iel.org
www.iel.org

PROJECT STAFF

Michael Usdan, *Project Director*
Barbara McCloud, *Project Associate Director*
Mary Podmostko, *Project Associate*
Larry Cuban, *Senior Project Consultant, Stanford University*

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For more information on the Initiative:

Mary Podmostko, *Project Associate*
Institute for Educational Leadership
1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 822-8405, ext. 37
Fax (202) 872-4050
podmostkom@iel.org
www.iel.org

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Preface

The Institute for Educational Leadership is pleased to publish this thought-provoking piece by Larry Cuban as a component of its School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative. Professor Cuban, who served as a school superintendent and teacher for many years in urban schools, surfaces some issues that badly need further discussion and debate.

As the standards movement matures, the need to differentiate testing and accountability strategies for very diverse districts is becoming more and more obvious. This paper not only provides valuable historical context for this discussion and debate but also documents the special importance and uniqueness of urban districts. It provides, we believe, valuable perspectives on why advocates of the long overdue and laudable standards movement must be more nuanced, not in their goal of high academic achievement for all students, but in their implementation strategies, particularly as they relate to the unique political, social, historical, and economic context of large urban school systems.

Michael D. Usdan
Project Director
Senior Fellow, IEL

Note: A portion of this essay appeared in the May 30, 2001, edition of *Education Week*. In that commentary, Dr. Cuban raised a few points about the complexities of urban school leadership that are dealt with here. In addition, he had two recommendations in the article that are incorporated here. Missing, however, from that *Education Week* commentary were the elaboration of the history, contexts, and deeper political issues that appear in this brief.

Urban School Leadership: Different in Kind and Degree

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Nationalizing Education Reform

In 2001, President George W. Bush appointed a big city African American superintendent to head the Department of Education, proposed an agenda for spending Title I funds that called for major improvements in urban schools, and asked states to test all children each year between 3rd and 8th grades. Although concentrating on urban schools with high concentrations of poor children, the President urged state and local leaders to raise academic achievement for all students. In doing so, Bush took the current accountability-driven, standards-based school programs he had championed for children in Texas and nationalized the reforms.

From this Republican president the commitment to standards-based reform and urban schools is ironic, but it surprises few observers familiar with the history of American school reform. For the last half-century the unrelenting criticism of public schools has been that they fail to teach basic literacy or develop appropriate moral behavior and character, and they produce graduates with few marketable skills in the workplace. This has largely been a critique of urban schools in which the ethnic and racial mix in these communities may change from one decade to the next, where less experienced and under-qualified staff work in deteriorating physical plants that serve chronically poor neighborhoods coping with drug abuse and crime.

This urban-based critique—richly amplified in the media—has been slapped onto all American schools. Popular culture films and television shows from *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) with lethal adolescents overwhelming a genial teacher to the television show *Boston Public* (2001) in which a teacher disciplines his class with a gun have helped Americans to think that all urban schools—except the one down the block—are like those portrayed in the media. Few pundits point out that these depictions of urban schools capture only a partial and exaggerated picture of what occurs in these schools. Nor do these critics say that what is portrayed too often suggests that all schools are like those depicted in film or television.

Equating inadequate urban schools with all public schools has encouraged sloppy thinking about American education. When it comes to criticism of American schools, for the last half-century, the urban tail has wagged the public school dog.

Pause for a moment and reflect on the flawed logic of those who tar all public schools with the urban brush. For example, if all American schools are lousy, including ones in cities, how can they have produced graduates who have entered and succeeded at colleges and universities which are highly admired by the rest of the world? And, how can the critics also ignore the rise in American economic productivity, global competitiveness and unrivaled prosperity—increases that have surged across the nation in the 1990s and that stem from those very same inadequately prepared high school and college graduates?

Fusing fears over particular urban schools with pervasive criticism of the entire public school system badly biases thinking about reform. When the U.S. Secretary of Education, supporting the President's "No Child Left Behind" plan, writes that "anyone who opposes annual testing of children is an apologist for a broken system of education," he equates reaching the "hard to teach—education shorthand for economically disadvantaged, limited English-proficiency, and special education students," or those concentrated in urban schools—with reaching all suburban and rural children (Paige, 2001).

What's wrong with crossing the city line and aiming for all children? First, the merging of criticism of poor, often racially isolated, schools with all schools ignores the substantial achievements of

administrators and teachers in tens of thousands of fine schools, including ones in cities. Second, the diversity among cities—the major differences between, for example, a San Diego and Philadelphia—are ignored. Third, the blending of urban with suburban and rural schools encourages presidents, governors, and corporate leaders to design solutions for ailing urban schools that become one-size-fits-all reforms treating all American schools as interchangeable cogs in a large machine.

Our nation's urban schools, particularly those in most need, are poorly matched to current popular reforms and leadership formulas packaged like brand-name products for schools across the country. For those who lead urban schools, different expectations, different obligations, and different city histories require far more moxie, skills, and political finesse than for their colleagues in middle- and upper-class, racially isolated suburbs. The all-purpose reform solution now treats all schools as the same while neglecting the vital linkages between cities, their schools, and the country's economic and social wellbeing.

Learning from the Past

"What shall we do with our great cities? The whole country is affected, if indeed its character is not determined by the conditions of its great cities" (Cronin, 1973).

The year was 1891. Progressive reformers of the day had hit upon a solution to make cities great: improve schools so that they can build strong American citizens by assimilating immigrants, increasing literacy to reduce poverty, and preparing workers eager to enter industry and business. To have schools achieve these purposes, new leadership and major reforms in school governance were needed.

In the years bracketing the turn of the 20th century, progressive reformers yanked schools out of urban political machines, downsized large appointed city school boards that dispensed patronage, and ended the bribing of school officials. They recruited civic-minded business and professional gentlemen (with an occasional woman) to serve on boards of education, and urged that these small boards hire professionally trained administrators to manage the schools. For well over a half-century after these reforms, university educated superintendents and principals served elected (and some appointed) school boards that were insulated from partisan politics. Civil-service regulations guided school boards' hiring of school staff, virtually ruling out nepotism and patronage while impartial and public bids reduced considerably the bribing of school officials in buying textbooks, building schools, and transporting children.

Beginning in the post-World War II years, however, another generation of reformers blasted public schools for inadequately dealing with international and domestic threats to the nation. During the 1950s, critics berated public schools for failing to keep pace with the scientific and military progress of the Soviet Union. The U.S. needed to produce more engineers and scientists to defend the nation in the Cold War. Educators responded by raising academic standards and increasing the number of math and science courses. Academic excellence became the beacon for educational leaders to follow.

The international threat, however, soon gave way to a serious domestic problem that another group of critics believed school leaders should solve. As the Civil Rights movement spread from the South to the rest of the nation in the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954), attention shifted from the Soviet threat to the inferior schooling black students received in the South and across the nation. Desegregation, rural and urban poverty, and dreadful conditions in so many urban schools housing minority students sparked another generation of reformers who sought equality in education. Civil Rights marches, school boycotts, and the ouster of urban superintendents ricocheted across the nation's cities. Federal wallets opened and educational leaders designed urban school programs to lift those at the bottom of society into the middle classes.

Yet by the mid-1970s, critics charged that the War on Poverty, like the one in Vietnam, had been lost. Reformers who wanted schools to reduce social injustice and improve the life chances of poor black and white children had failed, according to faultfinders. To worsen matters, these faultfinders believed schools—especially those in cities—had abandoned their mission of teaching basic knowledge and skills, respecting authority, and maintaining discipline. Incidents of violence in urban schools, illiterate high school graduates, and shabby teaching became front-page news and subjects of Hollywood films.

At about the same time, rising inflation, increased unemployment, and U.S. firms losing market share to Japan and Germany seized the policy-making agenda. The workplace was being transformed by computerization. From manufacturing to processing insurance claims, a New Economy for an information-based society emerged. As the revolution in the nature of work swept across the private

and public sectors, schools seemed stuck in the past. If schools, especially those in cities and low-income suburbs where over one-third of all children went, could not produce sufficient graduates to enter an entirely new workplace, then the nation's global competitiveness was endangered.

Copying Successful Businesses

Since the *A Nation at Risk* report (1983) judged public schools so mediocre as to jeopardize the economic future of the country, blaming educators has become common fare in the media. In the past two decades, a broad coalition of corporate executives, public officials, and business groups has pressed educational leaders to copy successful businesses. School leaders should do what successful corporate leaders have done: trim bureaucracies, focus on measurable goals, manage through incentives and penalties, and hold employees accountable for reaching desired goals. Presidents, mayors, business executives, and parents have said (and say again and again) that public schools must focus on preparing students for jobs.

Responding to scorching and unrelenting criticism, educators in suburbs, rural districts, and big cities, beginning in the early 1990s, have embraced systemic reform. They have established standards-based curricula, aligned the curricula to tests, monitored test scores closely, and rewarded and punished teachers, principals, schools, and students when scores rose and fell.

Confusing Setting Standards with Standardization

The swift spread of this brand of reform has become an early 21st century formula for reforming American public schools. The theory behind the current reform formula predicts that systemic school reform will produce graduates who can secure high-paying jobs for themselves while ensuring that American businesses can compete in the global economy. The theory also contains two assumptions: all public schools can profit from this approach and any good leader can put these changes into place, regardless of location. Both assumptions, embraced by President Bush and many other political and business leaders in their school reform packages, are flawed.

All public schools are hardly alike. In 50 states, almost 15,000 public school districts with almost 90,000 schools serve almost 50 million students. The social, academic, and cultural diversity among districts and within districts—think of New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago with high schools that send 90 percent of their graduates to college and others where no more than 10 percent continue their education—is stunning. Generally speaking, however, what now exists in the U.S. is a three-tiered system of schooling. Across the nation, there is a first tier of schools, about one in ten, that already exceeds the high academic standards and test score threshold set by the states. Another four to five of those ten schools—the second tier—either already meet or come close to their state standards and cutoff scores on tests. The rest, the third tier, don't. Most of these latter schools are located in urban and rural districts with high concentrations of poor and minority families.

Yet the current reform recipe is to hammer this three-tiered system of schooling into one mold. Forcing all schools to fit the same mold, however, ignores those students already meeting and exceeding those standards. Reformers confuse setting standards with standardization.

Reforming Schools—The Current Agenda

Current reforms, for example, do little for the thousands of elementary schools that perform far above the new standards in such places as La Jolla, California, Arlington, Texas, and Newton, Massachusetts. Nor does systemic reform do much for the hundreds of high schools such as New York City's Bronx High School of Science, New Trier High School in Winnetka (Illinois), or San Francisco's Lowell High School.

These reforms are aimed at the large number of urban schools struggling with students who perform in the lowest quartiles of academic achievement and often drop out. Publicly admitting this is politically risky because the majority of voters who are middle class, white, and live in suburbs might be distressed to see such targeted use of their tax dollars. Nor do these reforms, with their underlying aim to make schools an arm of the economy, touch upon the broad and historic purposes of tax-supported public schools: promoting democratic equality and molding citizens who contribute to their communities beyond being efficient employees.

Also needing inspection is the second assumption buried in the current reform agenda. In looking back over the last century, each generation of reformers sang one refrain again and again: the nation's schools need more and better school leaders.

Expecting More from Superintendents

Amid the rush toward accountability-driven reforms, the refrain has swelled into a loud chorus demanding every superintendent to manage bureaucracies efficiently, lead principals and teachers in instructional matters, and mobilize political coalitions of teachers, parents, and students to move schools from being inadequate and just good-enough to ones that are excellent.

These expectations imply that leading city schools is the same as leading suburban, small town and rural schools. That is not the case at all. Crucial differences distinguish urban school leaders from those in other districts.

First, while the early history of suburbs has been one of searching for racial and ethnic homogeneity, larger homes, and better schools, cities have been (and are) cauldrons of diversity that have both enriched and enervated schools. Century old conflicts over assimilating immigrants, using English as the sole language of instruction, desegregating schools, and reducing poverty have been proxies for dealing with issues of color and class, both mainstays of urban schooling. Leading urban districts—from San Diego to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania—have demanded from superintendents a keener sensitivity to inequalities and a well-developed capacity to deal with racial isolation, ethnic conflict, and economic disparities as they affect academic achievement both in the schools and the city itself. Yet no urban superintendent can afford to ignore the current wisdom, forged by corporate executives and public officials, that high academic standards and improved test scores lead directly to well paying jobs, even when the concentration on tests produces winners and losers in the academic sweepstakes.

As a result of public demands for improved academic achievement among those students who have historically done least well in school, persistent issues of race, ethnicity, language and class have required urban superintendents in small and large districts like Compton (California) or Baltimore to expand their customary repertoire of political, managerial, and instructional roles to cope with the abiding conflicts that arise time and again. For many urban superintendents, unequipped or unwilling to deal with these issues, the job is overwhelming. Frequent turnover among school chiefs created the false image of an impossible job and a turnstile superintendency. Those urban superintendents who thrive in the post learn to lead by consciously blending the political, managerial, and instruc-

tional roles to cope with the conflicts arising from issues of race and class as they affect test scores and the broader purposes of public schooling.

The second distinguishing characteristic for big city school superintendents is the strong belief that schools can help restore a city's economic, cultural, and social vitality. The once great American cities that were taken for granted in the early decades of the 20th century declined dramatically in post-World War II decades as they lost their appeal (and business) to suburbs—particularly with the increase in the tendency to cast poverty and crime in racial terms during the 1960s. As Cleveland Mayor Michael White said, "Big cities [became] a code name for a lot of things: for minorities, for crumbling neighborhoods, for crime, for everything that America moved away from." The mistaken belief that cities were ungovernable took hold (Siegel, 1997).

Not until the early 1990s with major shifts in work and the economy did some cities begin to see a reverse migration from suburbs and employers relocating because of lower land and labor costs. Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco have begun to regain their cachet of greatness while other cities such as Austin and San Jose have become magnets for technology-based businesses. "Like a mighty engine," former New York City Mayor David Dinkins said, "urban America pulls all of America into the future" (Siegel, 1997).

For many urban politicians, the quality of public schools plays a key part in attracting employers and young families to their neighborhoods and sustaining the vitality of cities. Their reputations as mayors in large and small cities are deeply affected by the quality of their schools. Some superintendents, unlike their peers elsewhere, have become key players in the revival of urban America and urban politics. Thus, President Bush appointing the Houston, Texas, superintendent as his Secretary of Education acknowledges symbolically this current truth.

These differences counter the prevailing assumption buried within standards-based reform that school leadership is the same across districts. Leading urban schools, unlike leading other districts, is intimately tied to a unique and complex mission: Through improved schooling, reduce the dire consequences of racial and ethnic isolation and the impact of poverty on academic achievement, while increasing the life chances of families and their children to succeed economically and to contribute to their communities. An unfortunate by-product of this distinct mission is the nourishing of the pervasive myth that schools alone can improve the life chances of poor children. They cannot.

Changing Governance Systems

Beginning in the mid-1990s, these differences in leadership requirements slowly and openly became acknowledged. Major changes in urban school governance geared to improving academic achievement have begun to alter urban school districts. In some cities, such as Baltimore, Chicago, Boston, and Cleveland, mayors have appointed school boards and superintendents; in these places schools have become another department of the city's administration. In Philadelphia, Detroit, and New York, mayors exercised substantial influence in picking school board members and exerted increasing control over school matters. In other cities, school boards, losing confidence in the ability of rise-from-the-ranks superintendents to manage big systems, have chosen non-educators to lead their districts. A former governor is Los Angeles' superintendent; a corporate attorney leads the New York City schools; former U.S. generals have led Seattle and District of Columbia schools; and an ex-U.S. Attorney is school chief in San Diego.

These reforms in urban school governance (mostly white, middle and upper-middle class suburbs and rural districts have not moved in this direction) are further evidence that cities impose broad and diverse challenges upon those who seek to lead urban districts. The history, demography, governance structures, and cultures in urban districts matter a great deal. Moreover, even among urban contexts, differences matter. Running the Los Angeles schools (with almost 750,000 students), for example, is very different from running the Boston schools 3000 miles away (with over 60,000 students).

Dispelling Some Urban Myths

Establishing that urban district leadership differs both in kind and degree from leadership of other districts is less difficult than eliminating the pervasive fictions that distort discussions about how to lead them. These myths are serviceable, that is, they advance the agendas of those interest groups that wield them as truths, but fictions are unhelpful in designing and implementing policies. Three obvious fictions need elaboration.

1. Big city school districts are ungovernable.
2. The superintendency is a revolving door that brings in and tosses out school chiefs one after the other.
3. Schools alone can improve the life chances of poor children.

Big city school districts are ungovernable. During the social tumult of the 1960s and the fiscal retrenchment of the post-Vietnam era, escalating crime, swelling welfare rolls, and reduced city services were amplified in media stories of whites fleeing to suburbs, uncollected garbage, and random violence on city streets. Cities were melting down. No mayor or city council, critics claimed, could grasp the complexities, solve the problems, or even mobilize the necessary resources to arrest the decline of one city after another. The idea that big cities were ungovernable stuck.

These problems inevitably affected schools. The notion that a superintendent, reporting to an elected school board of five to nine individuals, could govern, say, New York City with over a million students, and almost 80,000 teachers in nearly 1200 schools, strained belief. Racial and ethnic conflicts over desegregation, community control, school violence, high dropout rates, and abysmal academic performance, again richly documented by journalists, left the strong impression that urban districts were too large to be manageable. New superintendents entering on the heels of a departing school chief only to exit a few years later further sealed the impression.

In the early 1990s, however, a slow turnaround occurred in some of these apparently ungovernable cities. Candidates for mayor in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Denver, and Seattle took office after campaigning aggressively on platforms seeking to make their cities livable. Crime decreased. Investors saw opportunities for building offices and homes on cheap land abandoned by businesses decades earlier. Younger families and retired couples began moving back into cities. After serving two or more terms, these mayors trumpeted their victories in making cities attractive to businesses, residents, and tourists. Cities, they said, were governable again.

And so were schools. Efforts throughout the 1970s and 1980s to break up large urban districts into decentralized regions and sub-districts made them more manageable. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, while many urban superintendents churned out reform after reform only to depart, there were superintendents who worked closely with business and civic-led coalitions to engineer changes and stayed to see that they were implemented. Pittsburgh, San Francisco, and San Diego had leaders who built teams, delegated authority, and stayed for a decade or longer shepherding reforms into schools and consolidating their successes. Since the mid-1990s, school leaders in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, and Seattle have also developed cadres of educators who worked closely with mayors, business leaders, and parents to weld together broad support for their reform agendas. Viewing cities and their schools over a longer time span reveals the fiction that big city schools are ungovernable and that the superintendency was merely a turnstile.

The superintendency is a revolving door. Among executives in most private and public institu-

tions, the prevailing wisdom is for leaders and their teams to initiate reforms, and to serve as long as it takes to implement and consolidate the changes amid inevitable conflict. To make the case that reforming big city schools is an impossible job, however, many policy makers, writers, and researchers cite endlessly reports that big-city chiefs serve between two to three years before being ousted or resigning. They confuse *turnover* rates among groups of big-city superintendents with how long individual superintendents served in a post (*completed tenure*). When researchers have looked back at a century of "completed tenures" in the nation's 25 largest urban school districts, they found that tenure in these districts had indeed shrunk from an average high of 14 years in 1900 to just under six years in 1990. But a median of six years served in a big city district is almost three times more than the two plus years that opinion-makers repeat again and again (Yee & Cuban, 1996).

For every city that has superintendents entering and exiting every few years—New York in the 1990s, for example—there are other cities that have superintendents who have served five to ten years: Tom Payzant in San Diego and later in Boston, Gerry House in Memphis, CEO Paul Vallas in Chicago, Walter Amphrey in Baltimore, and David Hornbeck in Philadelphia. (House served eight years and left the district in 2000, the same year that Hornbeck resigned after serving six years. Vallas resigned in 2001 after five years.)

The myth of a revolving door urban superintendency is serviceable to professional associations since it drives salaries up and symbolically reinforces the image of hiring a superhero who welcomes an incredibly hard job with a high casualty rate. Nonetheless, the often-repeated claim that most urban superintendents serve a couple of years and depart is, in a word, false. Another equally serviceable fiction is the belief that schools by themselves can overcome the grim effects of poverty, racism and community neglect.

The schools alone can improve the life chances of poor children. Public officials, corporate leaders, and media scolds find it useful to hold schools solely responsible for curing ills that are located in the larger society. The current concentration on accountability-driven school reform assumes that if students, teachers, and principals in big city schools would work harder than they have in the past, then test scores would improve, more students would earn diplomas, and jobs in an information-based economy will await graduates.

Certainly there is some truth in the assumption. Much has been written about the prevailing low expectations for academic performance urban principals and teachers have held regarding poor and minority students. Studies have shown again and again how children in large schools easily get lost in the impersonal throng of students and hectic schedules of over-worked, underpaid staffs. Other studies reveal that schools that seldom meet academic standards suffer few consequences. This research gives credibility to the belief that harder work and higher standards will translate into higher student academic achievement.

What weakens the assumption, however, are other facts that policy makers, business leaders, and journalists neglect to mention. Anyone who has visited an urban elementary or secondary school for at least one week (not a drive-by visit) to sit in classes, listen to teachers and students, and observe lunchrooms, playgrounds, corridors, and offices would begin to appreciate a simple but inescapable truth: an urban school is deeply influenced by the neighborhoods from which it draws its students. Also of importance is that tax-supported public schools in a democracy are more than training grounds for future employees. Schools are expected to instill in students civic and social attitudes and skills that shape how graduates lead their lives in communities. Schools are expected to build respect for differences in ideas and cultures. These are historic aims of public schools that have been largely neglected in the rush to direct schools to be engines for the larger economy.

Yet the present agenda for urban school reform, narrowly concentrating on raising test scores and

getting jobs, largely ignores the pervasive influence upon the school of the community's particular racial, ethnic, and social class strengths and limitations. In middle class and wealthy neighborhoods, focusing only on what the school can do is reasonable since these families have the money and networks to provide help for their children with academic, health, or emotional problems and to live in communities where civic institutions thrive. That is not the case in poor communities. Families lack personal and institutional resources. They depend upon the school and other public agencies. In short, in cities, schools can't do it alone. This fundamental fact is ignored in the popular accountability-driven reforms.

A reform agenda focusing on pressing students, teachers, and principals to work harder is rational in the sense that these are precisely the ones who work in schools. There is also a political calculus that restricts the reform agenda to schools. To pledge school improvements by including families and neighborhoods would entail major expenditures by cities such as reconceptualizing schools as youth-serving agencies rather than places where the single most important job is to produce higher test scores. It would mean reorganizing existing city cultural, civic, and social services. Reformers stammer when faced with the scale of such changes.

Of course, broadening the urban agenda to encompass a community-based strategy to school improvement does not mean that students, teachers, and principals should be held less responsible for working hard to achieve their goals. Nor does this recognition of a school being nested in the larger community suggest that there should be different standards for those who are well off and those who are poor. The obvious fact that schools are entangled in their communities only makes clear the tasks that face urban school leaders. They need to mobilize civic and corporate elites and educate these opinion setters to the plain fact that raising academic achievement in big city schools involves far more than designing merit pay plans, threatening teachers and principals, or withholding diplomas for students who failed a graduation test. Few suburban or rural superintendents face such tasks.

An Initial Agenda for Action

This essay argues that the key assumptions driving standards-based school reform and accountability testing (all schools are basically alike and a one-size-fits-all leadership can solve America's school problems) are inapplicable to urban schools. The tasks facing urban school leaders differ both in magnitude and kind from guiding other school districts. Moreover, the web of fictions surrounding urban school reform mires ongoing efforts to improve schooling.

This, then, is a brief for spotlighting the importance and singularity of urban leaders in pursuing school reform. It also offers a glimpse of the tough tasks ahead for those who believe in the civic and moral obligations that accompany making both cities and schools far better than they are for those who have been so ill-served in the past.

For those who ask what comes next, following is an initial agenda for civic, business, and educational leaders committed to urban school improvement:

1. **More (and wisely spent) resources need to be plowed into urban schools.** There is simply no way around the fact that to achieve the mission of tax-supported public schooling in a democracy, educating urban children will cost far more than is spent now. Critics who cite Washington, DC, or Newark, NJ, as examples proving that the problem is not money, per se, but how it is spent by clogged bureaucracies, need to stay a few weeks in schools and classrooms in Boston and San Diego, and other reasonably well-managed urban districts. There, they would see clearly that insufficient resources are allocated to teaching and learning in urban schools.
2. **Press the public schools to go beyond vocational preparation.** Urban schools do more than crank out graduates to fill entry-level posts in the old and new economies. They equip students with the civic, moral, and personal skills and behaviors to live in a multicultural society. Civic, business, and educational leaders need to openly endorse and progammatically strengthen these larger purposes in urban schools.
3. **Provide special programs.** Urban schools struggling with large percentages of low-performing poor and minority students require unique in-school and out-of-school strategies that address the complexities of teaching and learning in cities. What works in middle and upper class suburbs cannot be cloned for urban classrooms.
4. **Reframe urban school reform as a civic project.** Incorporate an array of city-, neighborhood-, and community-provided social, medical, library, cultural, and recreational services in and out of school that are rooted in principles of youth development and that seek broader goals for youth beyond raising test scores.
5. **Concentrate on recruiting large numbers of urban teachers and principals.** Train these new leaders within urban schools through year-long paid supervised internships and intensive summer programs in cooperation with local colleges and universities. Pay premium salaries to those teachers and principals who complete the program and stay at least five years in the district.

Such an action agenda is only a beginning, of course. It sets a direction rather than offering a blueprint. Very few policy makers, researchers, practitioners, or business and civic leaders can spell out clearly what exactly has to be done to improve urban schools. Combining experimentation and practitioner street smarts will help school leaders chart a course. And it is the direction that matters. Professional educators and lay leaders know in their hearts that for the sake of the next generation, the vitality of cities, and the health of society, urban schools must do far more than raise test scores and prepare workers. They must prepare students to live in a multicultural society where individual character, community involvement, and civic competence are as essential as job skills and academic degrees.

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